

LOB TESTIMONY

Good evening, members of the committee. Thank you so much for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you tonight.

My name is Chelsea Humphrey, and I am a Case manager with The Connection Inc., Supportive Housing for Families Program. I would like to share with you this evening my experience as a Case manager and the story of one of my former clients, Evelyn Santiago.

I started working for The Connection Inc. in 2006. Though I had spent several years working as an interpreter and advocate for underprivileged families, I longed to be in a place that could provide real, long-term solutions to poverty and homelessness that would not simply be a band-aid on a deep wound. When I began working for the Supportive Housing for Families Program, I realized I had found this place. I started working with families mired in poverty and hopelessness and was able to give them immediate financial relief in assisting with rent and security deposits, and long-term support to help them rebuild their families, their self-confidence, and their lives. I visited these families weekly and built relationships with them and other community providers to create a whole net to surround them with support. Through supervision and direction from program management, I was encouraged to find the strengths in each individual, many times somewhat buried under years of hardship and distress, and build upon them to allow them to truly shine.

One such client was Evelyn Santiago. I met Evelyn and her two sons, Craig and Tishawn Tillman, in March, 2007. When I met them, they were living in a one-bedroom apartment that was often without heat, had roaches, and the bathroom ceiling had already fallen in repeated times. Evelyn shared her story with me, and told me how, as a young mother with her two little boys had been a victim of severe domestic violence. At one point, the father of her boys slammed her head into the bathroom mirror, causing her to end up in the hospital and giving her some permanent brain damage. After this event, Evelyn realized she needed to escape, and with not much more than the clothes she could pack into a suitcase she fled the state. She ended up here in Connecticut, homeless and without resources, and spent several months living in a hotel with nowhere else to live.

Evelyn eventually found the 1-bedroom apartment I previously mentioned, which though bad, was still better than the hotel. Her boys grew older, and Evelyn managed to put a life together on her own. However, though Evelyn was able to receive disability income through the state, it was not enough to cover rent, utilities, all the needs of two growing boys, and emergencies that life threw in her path. Her best friend as well as her father ended up passing away, Craig was having emotional and behavioral challenges, and her mother got sick. Evelyn, who was receiving \$950 a month, was having to pay \$650 a month in rent. Attempting to pay the bills and assist her sick mother, Evelyn fell behind

in her rent and was threatened with eviction several times. Emotionally, she had also gotten so distressed she was having a hard time making it day-to-day.

When I got involved, Evelyn was able to receive immediate relief as the Supportive Housing for Families assisted in her rental payments. I helped Evelyn get on track with other service providers to get more supports, and got involved with some of Craig's issues at school. Within a few months, Evelyn was able to move to a beautiful new apartment. We met with teachers and counselors from Craig's new school and helped start him moving in a whole new direction. Within another few months, Evelyn received a RAP certificate from the state; meaning that what had happened to her before would never need to happen to her again.

What a difference a few months can make! Evelyn began finding her spark again, using her voice to really advocate for her children's needs, looking after her own physical health, and decorating her new home (even buying flowers to plant in the garden!). The change in her outlook and emotional well-being were amazing. Tishawn got involved in volunteer activities and Craig got involved in the art club at school. Evelyn is now looking to find a job.

Today, Evelyn, Craig and Tishawn stand here to show you what a difference Supportive Housing for Families makes. As Evelyn graduated from the Supportive Housing for Families Program, she and her boys wrote me cards. I want to share with you some of their words: *"You have made such a mark on our family and you will never be forgotten. A year ago, we were on the brink of destruction. We went from hopelessness to HOPE to finally succeed."* Though I was fortunate enough to be her case manager, I cannot truly take all the credit for their words. It was Evelyn and her boys, together with the supports that The Connection Inc., Supportive Housing for Families Program, along with the permanent assistance that her RAP voucher provides, that gave her a change that will affect her whole life.

Thank you for letting me share.